

Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Hearing on “Department of Energy Oversight: Status of Clean Coal Programs”
February 11, 2014

(As Prepared for Delivery)

This hearing continues the committee’s ongoing oversight of the Department of Energy, and the status of its work to develop technologies that will help advance cleaner and more efficient electricity production from coal-based power generation.

For several decades, Congress has entrusted DOE through appropriations and legislative direction to help advance the technologies that will dramatically improve how we use our abundant coal resources to the benefit of the American economy. With its vast scientific, technical, and engineering capabilities, DOE continues to have great potential for helping to promote cleaner, less expensive electricity production.

DOE also plays a central role coordinating the nation’s energy policy and is most directly responsible for ensuring America has a secure, affordable, diverse, and reliable energy supply.

So our oversight of DOE should help illuminate two issues.

One involves the agency’s stewardship of the taxpayer funding Congress has provided the agency to pursue clean coal technologies. In addition to nearly \$3.5 billion in Recovery Act funding, the agency has been provided an average of \$350-\$400 million dollars annually over the past decade to pursue important answers about carbon capture and sequestration technologies for coal-based electricity generation.

According to DOE’s program plans, the purpose of this research is to develop workable and less expensive CCS technologies, and to introduce new efficiencies that will benefit any type of coal generation systems. But DOE’s own plans expect this will take decades to prove. We have a responsibility on this committee to ensure the groundbreaking work we entrust DOE to pursue is on track and not sidetracked by rushed decision-making or shortsighted policy initiatives that threaten meaningful technological progress.

Secondly, we also must work to spotlight how DOE is performing its role in the nation’s energy policy making. Over the past five years, we have witnessed an onslaught of EPA rules and proposals that have significantly affected or threaten to affect the nation’s ability to provide a diverse and abundant supply of electricity. At the same time, assumptions about the relative economic potential of various sources of energy have shifted over the past decade, with the newfound abundance of natural gas. This is raising new challenges and opportunities for an abundant energy future.

It is not yet clear whether DOE is really in the driver’s seat or taking a backseat to EPA on the policy or the technology matters that may have a direct impact on our national energy policy. So as we conduct our oversight, we should be mindful of and think about whether, in fact, DOE is truly up to the task, given existing authorities, for guiding policy and providing the research to support a secure energy future.

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